



American Association for State and Local History

Technical LEAFLET

Compiling Local History Bibliographies

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The usefulness and purpose of bibliographies

In historical investigation it is essential for the researcher to peruse secondary literature. Such studies answer specific questions; reveal that questions were not adequately posed; provide information for new directions of research, like locating sources of manuscripts and other documents; and indicate what was previously researched on a given subject. Secondary literature also provides background and supplementary material necessary to place past events in context and to assess their significance.

But locating histories and related studies is often as time consuming as searching for family and personal papers and public records. Although there are excellent state and local bibliographies to historical studies, historians usually search through a myriad of libraries, historical societies and reference works to locate information.

Staffs responsible for local history, whether historic structures, archives and manuscript collections, local libraries or museums, should encourage the compilation and dissemination of local history bibliographies. Such efforts will benefit the researcher as well as improve knowledge of historical literature and the history of the locality.

The word "bibliography" has at least two widely accepted meanings. The more sophisticated denotation refers to a science of books providing information on the development of book forms, their materials and methods of production, with the information arranged in a systematic fashion. This type of bibliography is usually too detailed and selective for local history research.

The type of bibliography described in this leaflet includes lists of publications and unpublished studies on some aspect of local history. The purpose of this bibliography is to lead an individual to the information con-

tained in studies, and not list their publication history or format.

Preliminary decisions

Because a bibliography of local history studies has a limited scope, choosing an area of research is probably the easiest preliminary decision a researcher will make.

But other aspects must be considered and decided upon as well. Will the bibliography be selective or comprehensive? What forms of studies will be included? What citation form will be used? Will you annotate the citations? What is the best format of recording information?

The comprehensiveness of a local history bibliography is determined by its primary purpose. Extremely narrow subject matter—such as one historic structure, a neighborhood or an individual—should include all studies available. However, studies of questionable value or studies poorly written and researched are not recommended unless you make an effort to trace the historiography of the subject. Good bibliographies contain all studies in professional historical journals, other reputable serials, books, and unpublished theses and dissertations.

Many bibliographies lose value for researchers by excluding theses and dissertations. Theses and dissertations are detailed, noteworthy investigations. Because the studies train historians in the use of sources and basic historical research, theses and dissertations are excellent references to locate other studies and primary research materials.

It is fairly easy to decide what information to include on the bibliography's citation form, and it's wise to make this decision at the start of a project. If the compiler has a publisher it is a good idea to discuss the citation form with the firm. And always write full notes on the studies, as this will save many hours later if revisions are made in the bibliography's format.

No matter what format you choose, always include the following information on citation forms. For books include the full name of authors, compilers, editors and translators; full title, place of publication, name of publisher and year of publication. For articles include the above information as well as volume and page numbers of the journal. Theses and dissertations require the same

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information plus title of degree and the name of the school awarding the degree. The number of pages for books and dissertations is often included and can be helpful. Sample entries are below:

Book

Howland, Richard H. and Spencer, Eleanor P. *The Architecture of Baltimore: A Pictorial History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953.

Article

Alexander, Robert L. "Baltimore Row Houses of the Early Nineteenth Century." *American Studies* 16 (Fall 1975): 65-76.

Dissertation

Eckels, Claire. "Baltimore's Earliest Architects 1785-1820." Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1950.

For more information on the technicalities of bibliographical entries, consult *A Manual of Style*, 12th revised edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), probably the closest to a standard reference among style manuals.

The primary purpose and intended audience of the bibliography will determine what type of annotations to use. For instance, very brief annotations are helpful when the study's title is vague. Longer annotations briefly summarize a publication's contents or include a critical evaluation of the merits and weaknesses of the work; such annotations necessitate a rather selective bibliography.

If you want the bibliography to provide critical evaluations of local history research, consider a more comprehensive historiographical essay. For most historians, though, a simple bibliography with little or no annotation and an easily designed subject arrangement is the most beneficial method of presentation.

Notecards, the standard 3" by 5", 4" by 6" or 5" by 8" sizes, are undoubtedly the most popular way to compile bibliographies. The notecard size to use depends on the amount of information you will record.

If you are familiar with the bibliographical format, a blank card is a good notecard choice. Then you can place notes for the annotation or the actual annotation itself below the work's title, making the cards easy to type or typeset. Another relatively inexpensive option is to have cards preprinted, with spaces left for bibliographical information and other notes. Preprinted cards are useful for noting library or other locations in case you re-examine the study later.

Finding the local history studies

The bulk of the compiler's time will be spent searching for local history studies. A natural starting place to find these works is the library of the local historical society, college or university with local history collections. Library catalogs and conversations with library staff will yield references for local history bibliographies.

Commemorative histories, genealogies, pamphlets and local popular histories may be available only in local history collections, without mention in basic references or bibliographies. Many of these works, especially family histories, are privately printed and not widely advertised or available. P.W. Filby, compiler, *American & British Genealogy & Heraldry: A Selected List of Books*, 2nd edition (Chicago: American Library Associates, 1975) is an excellent work for finding family histories.

Many organizations, particularly historical societies, publish journals which you should examine carefully. Though time consuming and tedious, this perusal is necessary for journals specializing in your geographical region. Since every state has at least one historical journal, this search is inevitable.

Check journals for articles, book review sections, advertisements and notices, as these can provide clues to other significant studies. In addition, systematically search other journals, especially if a good serial collection is nearby.

Fortunately, there are several basic bibliographies compiled at regular intervals that cover a lengthy period of time. The *Journal of American History* and *Journal of Southern History* feature invaluable quarterly or annual bibliographies of articles and dissertations.

Helen J. Poulton, *The Historian's Handbook: A Descriptive Guide to Reference Works* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), has an international scope, but describes the basic works for starting bibliographies.

Another excellent tool of bibliographical research is the *Writings on American History* series published by the American Historical Association from 1902 to 1961 (excluding 1904-1905 and 1941-1947). The *Writings* series is a mammoth compilation of books and articles that are briefly annotated and well indexed by subject and author. The series was superseded by the thrice-yearly *Recently Published Articles* and a retrospective listing of articles from 1962-1973 published in four volumes in 1976. Beginning with 1961, the bibliography only covers periodical literature, is not annotated, is arranged according to broad chronological and subject areas, and only contains an author index.

America: History and Life, published quarterly since 1964 by the American Bibliographical Center, Clio Press, is an excellent reference although it covers a shorter period of time than *Writings on American History*. The bibliography includes detailed abstracts of journal articles and, occasionally, festschrifts and edited compilations.

In 1972, the American Bibliographical Center published a retrospective volume covering journals from 1954 to 1963. That volume, extracted from its predecessor, *Historical Abstracts*, is international in scope.

The *Social Services & Humanities Index*, published quarterly by the H.W. Wilson Company since 1907, formed two publications in 1974, the *Social Sciences Index* and *Humanities Index*. The two quarterly publications contain many citations of value for local history. The *Humanities Index* covers English language periodicals in the fields of "archaeology and classical studies, area studies, folklore, history, language and literature, literary and political criticism, performing arts, philosophy, [and] religion and theology." The *Social Sciences Index* covers "anthropology, area studies, economics, environmental sciences, geography, law and criminology, medical sciences, political science, psychology, public administration [and] sociology."

An equally broad-scale publication is the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, published semi-monthly by the H.W. Wilson Company since 1900 and described as "a cumulative author-subject index to periodicals of general interest published in the United States." The *Readers' Guide* also includes a retrospective volume for 1890-1899 published in 1944.

Poole's Index to Periodical Literature, published in six volumes between 1882 and 1908, covers the years of

1802 to 1906 and, although its scope is wider than the *Readers' Guide*, it is an extremely outdated compilation.

More specialized bibliographies include the *Art Index* (1929-, quarterly, H.W. Wilson Company), *Music Index* (1949-, Information Coordinators, Inc.), and *Sociological Abstracts* (1953-, five times a year, Sociological Abstracts, Inc.). It is best to inquire about or consult the above references at a large public or university library.

Two specialized bibliographies are particularly noteworthy for local history research. One, the *MLA International Bibliography of Books and Articles on the Modern Languages and Literatures*, published annually since 1922 by the Modern Language Association of America, is a veritable gold mine of citations to the history of American literature, folklore and linguistics.

The second, titled the *Essay and General Literature Index*, published semi-annually since 1934 by the H.W. Wilson Company, is an "author and subject index to collections of essays, with particular emphasis on materials in the humanities and social sciences." Its first volume covers publications from 1900 to 1933.

One-volume comprehensive subject bibliographies are similar to specialized bibliographies. One example is *Afro-American History: A Bibliography*, Dwight L. Smith, editor (Santa Barbara, California: A-B-C Clio, Inc., 1974).

Alan Dundes compiled another comprehensive subject bibliography, *Folklore Theses and Dissertations in the United States*, a publication of the American Folklore Society, volume 27 (Austin: Published for the American Folklore Society by the University of Texas Press, 1976).

Also, the *American Reference Books Annual*, published by Libraries Unlimited Inc. since 1970, is a good record of recent bibliographies.

Locating dissertations is much easier since Xerox University Microfilms started the *Comprehensive Dissertation Index*. In 1973, Xerox issued a 37-volume index to *American Doctoral Dissertations* and its successors and Xerox's *Dissertation Abstracts International*. The *Comprehensive Dissertation Index* consists of a key word and author index arranged by disciplines and covers over 417,000 dissertations. The *Index* includes the author's name, title of the study, degree, date of award, school, number of pages and citation number for the location of the abstract in the monthly *Dissertation Abstracts International*.

Two other sources for dissertations are *Dissertations in History: An Index to Dissertations Completed in History Departments of United States and Canadian Universities 1873-1960* (N.p.: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), and *Dissertations in History: An Index to Dissertations Completed in History Departments of United States and Canadian Universities 1961-June 1970* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1972).

Locating masters theses is much more difficult than finding dissertations. *Masters Abstracts*, published quarterly since 1962 by University Microfilms International, is a selective compilation representing 90 participating institutions. For these studies, visit or write to schools with graduate programs in history, library science, education, sociology and other specialties of the humanities and social sciences.

Keep in mind, though, that professional historical research is only a development of the last century and that the majority of dissertations and theses and their offspring—monographs and scholarly articles—date only from the early years of the 20th century. Even though the work of amateur historians and antiquarians extends

back much further, include their work only to show early, pioneering or unique studies.

A final caveat should be mentioned. Always check citations to histories in footnotes, bibliographies and book reviews against the originals for accuracy before the final publication of the local history bibliography.

Organizing the bibliography

During compilation work, it is best to arrange studies by the last name of the author. This is the easiest method for arrangement, and for checking duplications or citations.

After you complete the compilation process, you must decide how to arrange the bibliography. Your primary goal is to create a bibliography that both amateur and professional historians can easily use for research.

A subject arrangement is the generally accepted format since this is the accustomed way researchers seek studies. An author index should always be included in bibliographies since this is another avenue of access commonly used by researchers. If you choose a chronological arrangement—sometimes used in local history bibliographies—you should also provide an author and subject index.

Another recommended method of arranging bibliographies is to assign each citation a number, given consecutively in the final arrangement of the bibliography. Consecutive numbering allows the bibliography to be indexed before page proofs and lets users go directly to the citation, eliminating a search through a page full of other references.

Other indexing rules are available in *A Manual of Style*, 12th rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) and other style manuals.

A subject or chronological arrangement can present enormous difficulties. There are always some studies that do not conform to the categories you develop. Developing an arrangement scheme when the compilation is either completed or nearly completed solves the odd subject problem, and allows evaluation of the studies and the choice of a scheme to reflect the nature of the local history research.

Examining other published history bibliographies will help provide ideas for the final arrangement. One general model is *The Journal of American History*, published by the Organization of American Historians. It employs a subject, chronological and geographical arrangement in its quarterly bibliographies.

Another good history bibliography is the *Recently Published Articles* of the American Historical Association. This publication uses a more closely defined chronological and geographical arrangement than the *Journal of American History*.

Though the above two publications use different arrangement methods, both have proved usable and can be adapted for local history bibliographies.

As you compile the bibliography, list potential subject classification categories next to the citation. Many studies will have more than one category and, in addition, it is easy to forget the content of studies over a long period of time.

Case studies of local history bibliographies

An excellent example of a cooperative bibliography on local history is *Massachusetts: A Bibliography of Its History*, John D. Haskell, Jr., editor (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1976). Sponsored by the Committee for a New England Bibliography, founded in 1969, the work is

organized by counties, cities and towns. The study includes over 13,000 citations to published work and an extensive subject and name index makes the volume a valuable reference.

Another example of a local history bibliography is *A Bibliography of Delaware Through 1960*, H. Clay Reed and Martin Bjornson Reed, compilers (Newark: Published for the Institute of Delaware History and Culture by the University of Delaware Press, 1966). Based upon the holdings of the four principal repositories in Delaware, the reference is arranged by 39 subjects with a detailed subject and name index.

New York in the American Revolution: A Bibliography, Milton M. Klein, compiler (Albany: New York State American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, 1974) is a local history bibliography with several slightly different twists. First, the publication covers only one specific time period. Secondly, it provides full annotations on both content and critical evaluation with a 17-page introductory essay on the historiography of the subject. Like the other bibliographies it contains a good index. Researchers using this bibliography will be able to carefully select the studies useful to their research.

Remember that a bibliography faces reduced usefulness if the work plan is poor. An example is the recently published *The Eastern Shore of Maryland: An Annotated Bibliography*, Enoch Pratt Free Library, ed., (Queens-town, Maryland: Queen Anne Press, 1980). The publication is handsomely printed, contains good annotations, and has a decent index but its citations are too selective. The book is limited to "published books and monographs and official state publications." By excluding scholarly articles, dissertations and theses, the book literally cuts out the heart of the historical literature of the eastern shore.

A number of local historical journals publish annual bibliographies that have significant value to researchers. The *Maryland Historical Magazine's* bibliography, published since 1975, is arranged according to subjects and includes articles, books, popular and scholarly publications, and unpublished theses and dissertations. It would be a significant contribution to the study of local history if every state had such an annual compilation.

Additional readings

Philip Gaskell, in *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), provides a recent, in-depth study of systematic bibliographies which was mentioned earlier in this leaflet. *Researching, Writing, and Publishing Local History*, Thomas E. Felt (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1976) provides a general introduction to local history that discusses many of the techniques one uses to compile local history bibliographies.

A new professional organization, the Association for the Bibliography of History, is "a group of historians, bibliographers, librarians and other persons who wish to promote the development of bibliographical skills and tools to facilitate the study of history." This association is headquartered at the Georgia State University in Atlanta, Ga. The association prints a newsletter which discusses bibliography in general and the publication of recent bibliographies.

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